

Front Page Full Page Other

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.
CHRONICLE

M. 330,225
S. 352,138

SEP 15 1965

Royce Brier

CIA in Weekly News Release

n excellent example of what you can expect when you deal with a bewildered government like that of South Vietnam, has come to light.

As you might also expect, the Central Intelligence Agency is apparently involved in what news stories described as an episode embarrassing to the American Embassy in Saigon, with at least three CIA officers reportedly declared persona non grata by the Vietnam government.

The story is told in a low key, and obviously covers a bitter wrangle in which the CIA was charged with taking a foreign policy flier which fell on its face. From the various evasions employed, the story emerges:

In the hill country south of Saigon are 700,000 tribesmen served by small forces nominally opposed to the Viet Cong guerrillas and allied with Vietnam. Two "united front" movements known as Fulro and Montagnard occupy the tribal areas, and have had American advisors and some unspecified military aid.

★ ★ ★

RECENTLY WILLIAM F. BEACHNER, an Embassy "political officer" (CIA), and two other CIA agents have been working with the tribal fronts.



But last week Vietnamese army units are said to have disarmed 1000 Fulro and Montagnard soldiers.

Sources close to the Vietnamese government aver the Americans were advising Fulro and Montagnard to seek "autonomy," and set up small independent states allied with Vietnam. Saigon calls these hill tribes "savages."

A Vietnam general named Co had what the news story calls an "acrimonious" meeting with American officials, and to have charged that CIA agents wrote a document addressed to the Montagnard on "how to negotiate" with the Saigon government in an autonomy effort.

Barry Zorthian, Embassy press officer, denied there were any formal charges against the Americans, but conceded the Embassy was willing to withdraw them to allay suspicions of the Vietnam government.

★ ★ ★

ALSO INVOLVED was a fear American air forces might bomb the tribal areas on recommendation of an American general, unnamed.

Friday Ambassador Lodge had a high level meeting with Vietnam officials, and is said to have urged against use of force in the area, and specifically to have demanded that if force was used, American equipment would not be employed.

So far as we can see, the Americans have come off second-best in this political imbroglio. Whether CIA can add this achievement to U-2, Bay of Pigs and Singapore in its record of foreign policy sallies by operatives you never heard of before, is not yet certain, because responsible officials are clearly minimizing the event with a marked reticence.

But the President, who makes foreign policy, and the Secretary of State who expounds it, will have an interesting time untangling the facts now so blandly glossed over.

September 15, 1965